

Conference Paper

"Media Man" in the Context of Developing Technologies of the Screen Documentary

Myasnikova M.A.¹ and Trukhina A.V.²

¹Doctor of philology, professor, Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

²Assistant, Yekaterinburg Academy of contemporary art, Yekaterinburg, Russia

Abstract

Under the conditions of mediatization as the most important factor shaping modernity along with globalization, individualization and commercialization, an individual receives the nomination of a "media man" on and acquires new functions in the development of media civilization. The "media man" acts as a new kind of not only "the product" and "the consumer", but also "the producer" and "the translator" of works of screen culture, including screen documentaries. General scientific and special scientific methods of research are used for writing the article. The article presents the results of systematization, understanding and analysis of the theoretical and historical scientific literature on mediatization and documentary films, as well as empirical observations of the practice of the Russian documentary. Prospects of the development of the documentary technologies in the changing conditions, including – within a new type of screen documentary – interactive and collaborative documentary cinema – idoc are outlined.

Keywords: media, "media man", mediaculture, screen culture, traditional, interactive and collaborative documentary.

Corresponding Author:

Myasnikova M.A.

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1. Introduction

The time we live in is called "the age of media and mediatization". This means that today there is an integration of media in various spheres of life. A. Gureeva writes that mediatization has recently become a theoretical basis for considering the interaction of media, society and culture [2]. Along with globalization, individualization and commercialization, mediatization is considered the most important factor shaping modernity. Media play an important role in all social changes, reflect a single picture of the world and rethink cultural values, transform the surrounding space and create the modern society. According to N. Kirillova, "The media is not just a means to transmit information, it is a whole environment in which cultural codes are produced, aestheticized and broadcast" [6, 22]. She also added that "the inclusion of the media in everyday reality is so great that many social processes can no longer be considered without a medial component, which confirms the status of the modern society as mediatized" [2, 203-204].

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Therefore, the individual these days is often called a “media man”, because everything that happens actively affects his psychological state and social practices. V. Mansurova states that the concept of “media man” is interpreted in the range from a simple and ordinary representation to a completely scientific “as a nomination of a new anthropological variety of the consumer and the creator of mass information” [8, 9]. In the past era there were such concepts as a “natural man” by John Locke, a “public man” by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Homo Economicus”, described by the political economists of the nineteenth century, a “social man”, discovered by the French sociologists of the twentieth century. The “media man” is connected with the media culture, defined as a special culture of the information society.

However, there is a “screen culture”, the value of which in the life of the modern society is extremely high. According to N. Kirillova, “It is the screen (including the computer display), absorbing the audiovisual-shaped capabilities of cinema (and then television and video), complementing and transforming them, that is becoming the material carrier of a new type of culture in all its forms: information, art and scientific” [7, 109]. The screen culture carries a new type of communication in the form of free access to the information space. The screen culture particularly influences the individual, and therefore, the analysis of human interaction of the media era with the technologies of screen documentaries is highly relevant nowadays.

2. Methods

The article is based on the theoretical positions formulated in the works of a number of scientists, as well as on the findings of our own research. General scientific and special scientific methods were used: analysis, synthesis, analogy, comparison, juxtaposition, description, and systematization, which made it possible to clarify some theoretical provisions related to the definition of the nature of the current media era and the impact of the media on humans in the context of the development of screen documentary technologies. The analysis of the theoretical and historical scientific literature on documentary films, as well as empirical observations of the practice of the Russian documentary provided the collection of the cases for the analysis and description of film production technologies.

3. Discussion

According to the scholar A. Flier, every individual has traditionally been in relation to the culture simultaneously in several forms, which are observed in his relations with the culture screen. *First*, the individual is a “product” of culture, introduced into its norms and values, trained in “technologies of activity and ethics of interaction with other people in the process of his inculturation and socialization...” [15, 128]. The individual is formed as a person, “socially and culturally adequate to the society” [15, 128]. The screen language, the most accessible and visible for the mass audience, not only forms the image of reality, but also very effectively programs the life positions and manifestations of the personality. After all, words are addressed to the consciousness of the individual, and visual images also affect his subconscious. *Second*, the individual is an active *consumer* of culture and uses in his social practice the norms of behavior and rules of culture (including media); the individual knows the languages of communication, as well as knowledge, skills and opinions as “tools and methods of personal self-identification and social self-actualization in this community” [15, 128]. At the same time, individuals should be free their perception. Thus, E. Prilukova defines, “Viewers choose who and what they like to see. They decide with whom to communicate and who to resemble” [11, 100]. *Third*, average individuals are now more and more often *producers* of screen culture, picking up a movie camera and participating in the creation of audiovisual text, for example, a documentary about themselves and the environment, and thus carrying out an act of independent creativity, and not just passive consumption of culture. Finally, *the fourth*, the individual is a *translator* of culture, transferring the created content to other people and putting it on the Internet.

First of all, it is the man that attracts the audience in the documentary film. This idea is confirmed by all the researchers of the documentary. In particular, L. Dzhulai writes, “the image of the hero is the basic component of the Soviet documentary film, which has a large and multifaceted tradition of embodiment” [5, 21]. In the domestic screen documentary film of the twentieth century there were certain traditions of human representation. G. Prozhiko draws attention to the fact that throughout the past century, the personality was continually minimised. Attempts to assert human uniqueness on the screen encountered the phenomena of mass-scale sameness of people’s consciousness in line with the socio-political trends that characterized that historical period. “The individual and the masses, individualism and collectivism are the oppositions that determined the emotional climate of the entire civilization of the XX century” [12].

But a lot of things change over time. From the understanding of the hero as a part of a complete picture of reality and the hero as an undivided part of the masses in the chronicle and documentary films of the 1920s, the documentary of the 1930s turned to the isolation of the individual from the crowd, bringing him to the forefront. Although, as noted by L. Dzhulai, “the crowd is revealing itself behind him visibly or invisibly” [4, 11]. The mid-1960s faced a surge of documentary in the culture as a whole: the genres of the essay, travel writing, memoirs, and documentary novel experienced a new birth. Archival documents like diaries, letters, and court records penetrated the stage. A new genre of documentary drama was formed. According to E. Gromov, the cinematography “claimed the particular poetics or aesthetics, called poetics of the documentary” [1, 79]. There was an active development of the heroic personality, and documentary filmmakers began to take an interest, first of all, in the mental state. They strived to convey on the screen the uniqueness of life as such and each human destiny taken separately; they closely watched the hero, but sometimes staying in the shadows. Such interest in the mental state of the individual is a remarkable accomplishment of documentary films of the middle of the past century. In the 1970s, the man began to look not only inside, but also from the outside, within the broader time context. That’s when the concept of embracing the world and people was developed.

Perestroika of the late 1980-ies, partly resonating with the “thaw” of the 1960s, created new characters, whose fates were increasingly “highlighting the era”. Documentary filmmaking was even more drawn to historical thinking and the connection of journalistic intent with artistic screen embodiment. At that time the task was about the degree of the author’s invasion of human life to solve certain problems, about the dialectic of fact and concept and the boundaries of the aesthetic deformation of reality.

Thus, A. Solntseva writes about the cinema of the mid-1990s, “New” documentary cinema changed optics, opening the world to the characters who were of interest to no one before, and to the people who were not famous and not even “typical” [14]. Back in the 1960s, it should be mentioned that our art came to a different understanding of the typical than ever before. It was taken not as the most common, but as expressing the characteristic, essential in life, which is best manifested in a particular and individual. S. Muratov also defends the idea of uniqueness of a person on the documentary screen, “Neither character, nor personality, nor mission can be reduced to typological formulas and be disclosed through the concept of social role” [9, 267]. Moreover, he believes that “the mystery of personality” can be solved only in the co-creation of the author with the personality. And today, “heroes are increasingly becoming a kind of co-authors of the picture, getting involved in the process of creation” [9, 269].

The film directed by Eugene Grigoriev with the iconic name *Lyokha-online* (2001) presents a 16-year-old boy living with his parents, who moved to a remote Ural village “to save the soul”. But even there he is a *product* of media culture, as he *dreams about the Internet*. Although the cherished dream has not yet come true, some interactive connection between the character and the world still arises, because the boy communicates with the audience, looking at them from the screen, as on Skype, “eye to eye”. Increasingly, the documentary is showing the real *consumer* of media culture, as the characters do not let go of gadgets and sit at computers. In the film with the deceptive name *Fundamentalist* (2002) the same E. Grigoriev showed a young scientist, not a religious fanatic, but a fan of his profession, Nikita Pozdeev, whose home computer is always at work. Lyokha from the Ural province was almost a co-author of the film, as was directly on the screen interested in shooting. Nowadays, many documentary filmmakers give their characters light, modern cameras or rely on their own mobile phone footage, thus turning them into media culture *producers*. This happens in the Grigoriev’s film *About rock* (2017), which describes young rockers, future “stars”, whom the film director asked to shoot what is important for them, but himself did not interfere in the shooting. In the course of the work, both new and old technologies were used: along with interactive methods of creating a picture, the “old as the world” method of long-term observation was used.

But recently there has been a new kind of documentary – the so-called idoc – interactive documentary film, which is known to a few, but which presents all the embodiments of human media culture. The man here is a product, a consumer, a producer and a translator of media culture, as the head of the creative laboratory for the creation of interactive documentaries at St. Petersburg University, professor N. I. Dvorko mentions in his work. These films are also called new media documentaries, digital documentaries, etc. Similar projects are carried out today in the USA, Holland, and Canada. As for the participation of “media man”, now he is not just a spectator, interpreter or “evaluator” of traditional films. In interactive documentaries, the “media man” participates in the deployment of the narrative and determines how the story is told. Through the interface, the user physically interacts with the media objects of the content, as well as controls the navigation, laying its own route through the history [3, 303]. Thus, the “media man” becomes a participant of the internal dialogue with the audience, a content producer and a broadcaster in the process of joint (collaborative) creativity.

4. Results

Apparently, the prospects for the development of screen documentaries are great and varied, as all four embodiments of the modern “media man” are shown: a product, a consumer, an independent manufacturer and a translator of screen products. The “visual” man of M. McLuhan, who aspired to distant goals and encyclopedic programs, has been replaced today by the “electronic man”, which is characterized by the immediate involvement in communication and direct dialogue. Now person (in the film and on the television) is called “knowledgeable” *and co-presenter, co-author, commenter, and informant*, as S. Protodyakonov writes [13, 74]. All this is combined “with different activities, with interpersonal interaction, with the self-determination of individuals, whose opinions, assessments and tastes can change” [10, 115]. Today there is a dynamically developing phenomenon of the digital age, a new kind of on-screen documentary - interactive documentary -, which in the conditions of rapid improvement of the Internet and web 2.0 technologies demonstrates the latest technological capabilities. And the main effect of all that is the changing role of the average person in the development of media civilization.

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